

Making an English Voice: Performing National Identity during the English Musical Renaissance

In a 1925 article for *Music & Letters* entitled ‘On the Composition of English Songs’, the British musicologist Edward J. Dent urged the ‘modern English composer’ to turn serious attention to the development of ‘a real technique of song-writing’.¹ As Dent underlined, ‘song-writing affects the whole style of English musical composition’, for

we English are by natural temperament singers rather than instrumentalists [...] If there is an English style in music it is founded firmly on vocal principles, and, indeed, I have heard Continental observers remark that our whole system of training composers is conspicuously vocal as compared with that of other countries. The man who was born with a fiddle under his chin, so conspicuous in the music of Central and Eastern Europe, hardly exists for us. Our instinct, like that of the Italians, is to sing.²

Yet, as he quickly qualified: ‘not to sing like the Italians, for climactic conditions have given us a different type of language and apparently a different type of larynx’.³

¹ I am grateful to Byron Adams, Daniel M. Grimley, Alain Frogley, and Laura Tunbridge for their comments on this research.

E. J. Dent, ‘On the Composition of English Songs’, *Music & Letters*, 6.3 (July, 1925).

² Dent, ‘On the Composition of English Songs’, 225.

³ Dent, ‘On the Composition of English Songs’, 225.

With this in mind, Dent outlined a ‘style of true English singing’ to which the English song composer might turn for his ‘primary inspiration’: a voice determined essentially by ‘the rhythms and the pace of ideal English speech – that is, of poetry’, but also, a voice that told of the instinctive ‘English temperament’. The English singer did not ‘let [himself] go in the way that Italians do’, for example, as Dent explained.⁴ That said, the English singer did, or should, indulge himself in a certain kind of abandon: ‘the natural man sings in his bath; he is in a state of nature’. This ‘natural state’, as Dent lamented, had been lost in ‘modern’ times: the ‘inhibition of natural vocal instinct is a product of modern civilisation, like the equally unnatural habit of reading poetry in silence’.⁵ Thus, Dent encouraged the song composer to rediscover his ‘pre-modern’ vocal instincts: to ‘go out into the garden and bawl at the top of [his] voice’, recovering the voice of ‘natural man’ in the creative act of his song.⁶

Central among Dent’s concerns in ‘On the Composition of English Songs’ was to promote improvement in standards of native art song composition by encouraging the English composer to take inspiration from an ‘ideal’ and historic mode of English declamation. As such, he contributed to a series of debates surrounding both song composition and singing in English that had emerged in the earliest issues of *Music & Letters*,⁷ and that gained momentum within British musical culture during the 1920s

⁴ Dent, ‘On the Composition of English Songs’, 225–6.

⁵ Dent, ‘On the Composition of English Songs’, 227.

⁶ Dent, ‘On the Composition of English Songs’, 226–7.

⁷ See, for example, Harry Plunket Greene, ‘The Future of the English Song: I. The Singer and the Public; II. The Singer and the Composer’, *Music & Letters*, 1.1 and 1.2 (1920), 19–26 and 123–34.

in particular.⁸ Lurking within such discussions, as within Dent's article, was a notion that simultaneously emerged from but reached beyond questions of the pronunciation and declamation of English text: namely, the possibility of recovering a 'pre-modern', 'natural', and even somehow distinctively 'English' singing voice. This idea captured the imagination of British musical culture during the so-called 'English musical renaissance',⁹ a nationalistic movement in which musicians staged particular narratives and performances of cultural renewal, negotiating questions of national identity and modernity by appealing to distant (and often fictitious) national pasts,¹⁰

⁸ On the trend towards translating *Lieder* into English during this period, see Laura Tunbridge, 'Singing Translations: The Politics of Listening Between the Wars', *Representations*, 123.1 (Summer, 2013), especially 'Singing in English', 55–66.

⁹ I will not address here the complex issue of distinctions between 'British' and 'English' national identities, my blurring of which reflects the practices of early twentieth-century British musical culture, as Alain Frogley has pointed out: see 'Constructing Englishness in Music: National Character and the reception of Ralph Vaughan Williams', in *Vaughan Williams Studies*, ed. Alain Frogley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 6, n. 9.

¹⁰ See Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Over the past three decades, historians and musicologists have drawn upon such influential theories of nationalism in order to situate the English musical revival of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries in relation to broader 'inventions of tradition' within contemporaneous British culture. See, for example, Meirion Hughes and Robert Stradling, *The English Musical Renaissance 1840–1940: Constructing a National Music*, 2nd rev. edn. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

in search of ‘authentic’ sounds and experiences of musical Englishness that had supposedly been lost in an increasingly industrialized and urbanized society.¹¹ As is suggested by Dent’s directive that the composer become a singer, song composition and performance were frequently imagined as powerful and connected practices through which to rediscover ‘pre-modern’ modes of English musical expression. In the words of another eminent musicologist, Jack Westrup, song – or rather, its community performance – represented the one traditional musical heritage to which England could lay claim. As he reflected in 1947,

The English vein is no sentimental fiction; but it is easier to admit than to define. It is certainly something more than the supposed heartiness of ‘merrie England’ [...] The background of our music is the world of amateurs [...] The tradition we absorb is shaped by circumstances. Song still lives, because we are a singing nation. From Dowland to the present day the line, though sometimes thin, is scarcely broken.¹²

¹¹ On the promotion of an idealized view of the countryside and its associated idealized past in English culture and literature, see, for example, Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1973). For an analysis of the revival of historically remote musical idioms in relation to the early twentieth-century rural movement, see Alun Howkins, ‘The Discovery of Rural England’, in *Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880–1920*, ed. Robert Colls and Philip Dodd (London: Croom Helm, 1986), especially 70–4.

¹² J. A. Westrup, ‘Music’, in *The Character of England*, ed. Ernest Barker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947).

Like Dent, Westrup associated the stylistic voice of twentieth-century English music with the literal voices of a historic singing public. In such constructions of national musical identity, the performance of song became a ‘crucible in which time and its memories are collected, reconstituted, and preserved’.¹³

In her study of music’s role in British cultural renewal after the Second World War, Heather Wiebe contends that the past imagined as sound figured powerfully in mid-century reconstructions of cultural continuity and community.¹⁴ A conception of sound as a portal to the past – one of a series of ‘invisible ties that bind people into communities, link[ing] the present with the past’¹⁵ – might be considered to have played a significant part in an earlier phase of British cultural renewal: that which characterized the early decades of the twentieth century, during which the revival of English music flourished. At the heart of this movement lay initiatives devoted as much to the recovery of the glories of England’s musical past, as to the regeneration of music making and music education in the nation, and in turn, to the development of

¹³ Daniel M. Neuman, ‘Epilogue: Paradigms and Stories’, in *Ethnomusicology and Modern Music History*, ed. Stephen Blum, Philip V. Bohlman, and Daniel M. Neuman (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 269, cited in Caroline Bithell, ‘The Past in Music: Introduction’, *Ethnomusicology Forum*, 15.1 (June, 2006), 4. Bithell draws upon Neuman’s theorization of musical performance (especially in non-literate societies) in order to consider how ‘echoes of the past can still be heard in the music of the present’. As she maintains, ‘performance, particularly in the context of ritual, reaffirms the past and keeps it alive’.

¹⁴ Heather Wiebe, *Britten’s Unquiet Pasts: Sound and Memory in Postwar Reconstruction* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹⁵ Wiebe, *Britten’s Unquiet Pasts*, 2.

a distinctive compositional idiom in the music of native composers.¹⁶ While scholars have long assumed a link between these various ‘stages’ of the so-called renaissance, what remains less clear is how the regeneration of musical performance and education inspired the development of a particular compositional style.¹⁷ As I shall suggest, the notion of sounding a ‘pre-modern’ English voice became both an idea and a practice around which the various projects of early twentieth-century English musical revival converged.

I propose in this article that the burden of defining a ‘native voice’ for English music fell not only to composers but to a community of English singers. The opening decades of the twentieth century saw an unprecedented outpouring of texts devoted to the subject of ‘singing and voice production’, as vocal pedagogues, physicians, and elocutionists gathered together to advise a broad British public on the production of the voice in singing, as much as in speaking.¹⁸ Emerging in part as a response to a

¹⁶ The classic histories of this movement are Frank Stewart Howes, *The English Musical Renaissance* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1966); Peter J. Pirie, *The English Musical Renaissance* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1979); and Michael Trend, *The Music Makers: The English Musical Renaissance from Elgar to Britten* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1985).

¹⁷ Frank Howes made this point in 1966: see *The English Musical Renaissance*, 343.

¹⁸ Percy Scholes pointed to the manner in which books on the voice and its use in singing ‘poured out’ during the late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries: see Scholes ed., *The Mirror of Music 1844-1944: A Century of Musical Life in Britain as Reflected in the Pages of the Musical Times*, 2 vols (London: Novello and Oxford University Press, 1947), vol. 1, 289, and 286–91.

perceived decline in standards of singing in England,¹⁹ these unexplored discourses promoted the recovery of a vernacular for classical vocal performance.²⁰ Through investigating how this culture of performance and pedagogy promoted conceptions of an ‘English voice’, a series of new perspectives upon constructions of national musical identity in early twentieth-century British musical culture can be drawn into focus. As George Revill has briefly noted, this was a period in which the English composer was imagined as a ‘minstrel’: an ancient, wandering singer, who bore, simultaneously, a social responsibility to speak both to and on behalf of the nation.²¹ Inherent in such unexamined constructions of national musical identity is a complex and intriguing notion of plural musical voices that is probed throughout the current article. By investigating such voices, I suggest that ‘song’ became a place in which a community of singers were drawn together in order to re-sing lost voices of the past in the present, fortifying an idealized future in which the voices both of composers and performers shared in the making of a national music.

In order that this complex cultural idea may be explored and elaborated, the current article is divided into three sections: the first two trace the origins and

¹⁹ See Scholes ed., *The Mirror of Music*, vol. 1, 290.

²⁰ Sydney Northcote pointed briefly in 1966 to the ‘particularly healthy’ prominence of a vocal ‘vernacular’ in England, locating the origins of ‘an English school of singing’ in songs written by Henry Purcell for Richard Leveridge, a bass singer who was also a composer. See Northcote, *Byrd to Britten: A Survey of English Song* (London: John Baker, 1966), 18.

²¹ See George Revill, ‘The Lark Ascending: Monument to a Radical Pastoral’, *Landscape Research*, 16.2 (1991), 25.

development of ideas surrounding the ‘English’ singing voice in early twentieth-century musical culture, and the last reflects upon how a dialogue between an aesthetics of vocal performance and an aesthetics of art song composition might begin to be recovered.²² Here, I take as a case study Ralph Vaughan Williams’s ‘Silent Noon’, a song that became a ‘recital staple’ in early twentieth-century British musical culture,²³ and that today remains one of the best known and most frequently performed of this ‘quintessentially English’ composer’s art songs.²⁴ In situating

²² It has often been assumed – though not explored – that twentieth-century English song composers were inspired and influenced by contemporaneous styles and trends in the spheres both of vocal performance and pedagogy. As Trevor Hold has maintained, for example, an important factor in any aesthetics of early twentieth-century English song must take into account the manner in which composers were ‘complemented and inspired’ by the voices of singers such as Gervase Elwes and Harry Plunket Greene. See Hold, *Parry to Finzi: Twenty English Song-Composers* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2002), ix-xi. Stephen Banfield has briefly discussed the seminal influence of Harry Plunket Greene’s teachings upon Gerald Finzi’s development as a song composer: see Banfield, *Gerald Finzi: An English Composer* (London: Faber & Faber, 2008) 34–7.

²³ See Sophie Fuller, ‘The songs and shorter secular choral Works’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Vaughan Williams*, ed. Alain Frogley and Aidan J. Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 113.

²⁴ See Allan W. Atlas, ‘Vaughan Williams’s “Silent Noon”: Structure and Proportions’, *Musical Times*, 150.1907 (Summer, 2009). On Vaughan Williams’s fraught and complex reception as a ‘national’ composer, see Frogley, ‘Constructing Englishness in Music’.

constructions of national musical identity in ‘Silent Noon’ against the backdrop of a contemporaneous vocal culture, my article mitigates the paucity of scholarly attention devoted to twentieth-century English art song and its singers,²⁵ by drawing upon perspectives developed in recent studies of song, voice production, and national and aesthetic identity.²⁶ Such studies provide a series of concepts with which to begin an exploration of the complex ways in which ideas of real singing voices intersected with ideas of a figurative compositional voice in early twentieth-century British musical culture. As such, my article deepens understandings of how key ideals of English musical revival could be performed and embodied, thus rethinking the relation between music and culture during the English musical renaissance. This notion has been subject to considerable scholarly criticism in recent years,²⁷ and an influential

²⁵ Sophie Fuller outlines this neglect in ‘The songs and shorter secular choral works’, 106–7. This chapter represents a rare and necessarily brief examination of early twentieth-century English vocal culture. See also by this author ‘“The Finest Voice of the Century”: Clara Butt and Other Concert Hall and Drawing-Room Singers of Fin-de-Siècle Britain’, in *The Arts of the Prima Donna in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Rachel Cowgill and Hilary Poriss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). Also important in this regard is Tunbridge, ‘Singing Translations’.

²⁶ See, principally, Katherine Bergeron, *Voice Lessons: French Mélodie in the Belle Époque* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), and Julian Johnson, *Mahler’s Voices: Expression and Irony in the Songs and Symphonies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

²⁷ See Hughes and Stradling, *The English Musical Renaissance*, and Alain Frogley’s trenchant critique of this study, ‘Rewriting the Renaissance: History, Imperialism and British Music Since 1840’, *Music & Letters*, 84.2 (May, 2003), 241–57.

body of contextual work has been undertaken with a view to challenging perceptions of twentieth-century British music as an insular, regressive retreat from twentieth-century social modernity, as much as from contemporaneous expressions of artistic modernisms.²⁸ In line with such work, it will be demonstrated that vocal culture became an arena in which conflicts inherent in broader narratives of national identity were played out, as the making of an ‘English voice’ revealed tensions between the claims of tradition and modernity. With this in mind, current understandings of twentieth-century English song as ‘Romantic song’ remain open to revision, a project preliminarily advanced in my concluding discussion of the national voice self-consciously sounded in Vaughan Williams’s ‘Silent Noon’.²⁹

Discovering the English Voice: Songs of Ancestral Voices

An emphasis upon song as a repository of history – and of the ‘authentic’ English voice – was inspired in part by the discoveries of the first folk song revival, whose pioneers had unearthed a wealth of ‘ancestral’ English music purportedly preserved in the ‘unlettered’, oral cultures of the countryside.³⁰ Through the collection of such

²⁸ See, for example, the chapters collected in Matthew Riley ed., *British Music and Modernism, 1895–1960* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

²⁹ The designation of twentieth-century English song as ‘Romantic song’ is advanced in the two key studies of English song available: see Stephen Banfield, *Sensibility and English Song: Critical Studies of the Early Twentieth Century* (1985; First paperback edn., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), and Hold, *Parry to Britten*.

³⁰ See, for example, Richard Sykes, ‘The Evolution of Englishness in the English Folksong Revival, 1890–1914’, *Folk Music Journal*, 6.4 (1993), 448–9. As Sykes

music and its subsequent publication for performance by the nation at large, folk songs were believed to represent a powerful raw material from which native art music would grow.³¹ The folk movement has been maligned by some historians, who have leveled charges that upper middle-class collectors including Lucy Broadwood, Cecil Sharp, and Ralph Vaughan Williams expropriated the music of ‘peasant’ communities for their own purposes, modifying and distorting songs collected from unacknowledged performers and inventing a tradition of ‘the folk’ as the embodiment of an idealized rural past, in part as a response to the crises of modernity.³² In more recent scholarship, however, it has been countered that both the motivations and the collecting methods of early twentieth-century folklorists have been misrepresented,³³

summarizes, the ‘zeal’ of the first folk revivalists was ‘rooted in the conviction that the songs which they discovered were exclusively linked with a form of society which was fast disappearing [...] such societies – steeped in the continuous forms of a traditional culture – were in marked contrast to the apparent flux of metropolitan culture with which most of them were familiar [...] [T]he isolation, the absence of formal education, and the intimacy with nature gave the singers and their communities an air of timelessness which linked them to the past’.

³¹ Cecil Sharp set out such influential theories in *English Folk-Song: Some Conclusions* (London: Simpkin & Co.; Novello & Co., 1907).

³² See, principally, David Harker, *Fakesong: The Manufacture of British ‘Folksong’ 1700 to the Present Day* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1985), and Georgina Boyes, *The Imagined Village: Culture, Ideology and the English Folk Revival* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993).

³³ See C. J. Bearman, ‘Cecil Sharp in Somerset: Some Reflections on the Work of David Harker’, *Folklore*, 113.1 (April 2002), and by the same author, ‘Who Were the

and that questions of class and cultural politics have obscured the artistic and musical priorities of composers, scholars, and educationists such as Sharp, Vaughan Williams, and Lucy Broadwood in particular. As Dorothy de Val has considered: the villages from which – and the singers from whom – such musicians drew creative inspiration were not entirely ‘imagined’.³⁴

With such revisionism in mind, a question worthy of further attention is the extent to which some early twentieth-century folk collectors appear to have been motivated as much by the prospect of collecting a body of ‘national songs’, as by the possibility of mediating the performance of a ‘traditional’ English voice.³⁵ As

Folk? The Demography of Cecil Sharp’s Somerset Folk Singers’, *The Historical Journal*, 43.3 (September 2000). See also E. David Gregory, *The Late Victorian Folksong Revival: The Persistence of English Melody, 1878–1903* (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2010).

³⁴ Dorothy de Val, ‘The Transformed Village: Lucy Broadwood and Folksong’, in *Music and British Culture, 1785–1914: Essays in Honour of Cyril Ehrlich*, ed. Christina Bashford and Leanne Langley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

³⁵ Such work is underway: Graham Freeman’s recent research into Percy Grainger’s methods as a folk collector highlights the extent to which Grainger sought ‘not simply to provide another body of songs in print that musicians and children could learn to sing, but to establish the vital importance of the performance practice and musical aesthetics of the performers themselves and to shift the emphasis away from the song as a fetish object’. See Freeman, ‘Grainger and the Performativity of Folk Song’, in *Grainger the Modernist*, ed. Suzanne Robinson and Kay Dreyfus (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 43. Vaughan Williams’s complex interest in mediating folkloristic performance is explored at length in my doctoral thesis: see ‘Vaughan Williams,

historian Simon Featherstone has recently interpreted, Cecil Sharp's 'discovery' of the folk song 'The Seeds of Love' (a 'prize' famously 'captured' from the lips of the gardener John England in the village of Hambridge, Somerset, in 1903) was less of a discovery than Sharp's powerful mythology suggested, for this song had already been published by the Folk-Song Society two years earlier.³⁶ With this in mind, the particular value of Sharp's encounter with John England lay at least in part in the promise of appropriating and recreating an 'authentic', 'pre-modern' mode of English musical performance and expression, as Sharp underlined when he staged a performance of 'The Seeds of Love' by a trained contralto on the very evening of its collection.³⁷ Such mediation was amplified through Sharp's subsequent promotion of folk singing in schools, exerting pressure upon the Board of Education until it published a book of suggestions for teachers, in which the role of folk song was given particular prominence in the teaching of singing.³⁸ His expression of anxiety towards the dominance of 'foreign vocalists, singing in a foreign tongue' was essential to his cultural and educational project.³⁹ Tellingly, an emphasis upon the singing of folk songs in order to develop particular techniques of 'voice production' was outlined in original drafts of his pamphlet *Folk-Singing in Schools*, as correspondence between

Song, and the Idea of "Englishness"', DPhil diss. University of Oxford, 2014.

³⁶ See Simon Featherstone, *Englishness: Twentieth-Century Popular Culture and the Forming of English Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 150–1.

³⁷ Featherstone, *Englishness*, 151.

³⁸ On Sharp's involvement with the Board of Education, see, for example, Boyes, *The Imagined Village*, 66–9; Sykes, 'The Evolution of Englishness', 471–2; and Bearman, 'Who Were the Folk?', 752.

³⁹ See Howkins, 'The Discovery of Rural England', 69. See also 77–8.

Sharp and Vaughan Williams reveals.⁴⁰

The recovery of an ‘ancestral’ English voice may be considered to have exerted a powerful impact upon various spheres of early twentieth-century British culture. Historian Robert Colls, for example, has pointed to a preoccupation with the sounds of the words and songs of ‘the Celts’ during the early decade of the century, and has drawn attention to the frequent publication by non-native speakers of Hebridean-Gaelic fishing songs, often without translations. As Colls underlines, the songs, crafts, customs, and languages of the Celtic peoples of Scotland, Ireland, and Wales were considered by late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century English artists as a source of inspiration and regeneration, representing communities ‘unspoilt’ by the corruptions of modernity. Such people were imagined to have preserved the authentic voices of pre-industrial Britain, as Colls concludes, interpreting that ‘it was

⁴⁰ See Cecil James Sharp, *Folk-Singing in Schools* (1912; London: The English Folk Dance Society, 1923), especially 15 and 17. Here, Sharp advocated the use of folk songs to encourage ‘good vocalization’ and ‘the production of a natural, easy and full [vocal] tone’. Vaughan Williams hotly contested Sharp’s wording of directions to ‘voice production’ in early drafts of *Folk-Singing in Schools*, advising that the words ‘voice production’ be removed, as ‘so much so-called voice production is bad and unnecessary’. As he insisted, ‘real voice production – the encouragement of a full clear pleasant sound whether in speaking or singing [...] is *absolutely necessary* and a most important part of the development of the child’s best nature’ (Vaughan Williams’s emphasis). For their correspondence on this matter, see Michael Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980; repr. Clarendon Press, 2002), 102–3.

not necessary to speak Gaelic, Erse, or Welsh in order to appreciate the beauty of those voices, for beauty was in the beholding'.⁴¹

In his rare chapter on the voice as a site upon which negotiations of national identity were staged during the early twentieth century, Simon Featherstone suggests that elocutionists, linguists, and phoneticians active in England from the first decade of the century onwards derived powerful imaginative impetus from the 'discoveries' of the first folk revival. As he asserts:

[a] founding myth of twentieth-century Englishness locates the re-discovery of its authentic voice in the encounter between Cecil Sharp and [the folk singer] John England [...]⁴² Cecil Sharp's project to revive English folk-song, as with his work with the morris dance, was part of a nationalist strategy which, like that of elocutionists, intended to purify the traditional English voice from the corruptions of modernity.⁴³

Though Featherstone makes an important connection between developments in musical culture, on the one hand, and broader social concerns with the speaking voice, on the other, his study does not turn attention to the way in which elocutionists

⁴¹ See Robert Colls, *Identity of England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 275–8. The early twentieth-century tendency to romanticize notions of the 'otherness' of 'Celtic' singing of one kind or another deserves attention, though this topic lies beyond the scope of the current article.

⁴² Featherstone, *Englishness*, 150.

⁴³ Featherstone, *Englishness*, 141.

often worked closely with pedagogues active in the revivalist promotion of classical vocal performance, especially during the interwar years.⁴⁴ Such relationships developed with some momentum early in the century, and were formalized with the establishment of The Society of English Singers in 1913, founded under the guidance of an honorary secretary, Dr William Arthur Aikin.⁴⁵ Aikin's cornerstone text *The Voice: An Introduction to Practical Phonology* (1910) was influential in shaping perspectives on singing and voice production throughout the first part of the century.⁴⁶ Members of the Society ranked among them not only prominent British vocalists – including Harry Plunket Greene, Steuart Wilson, Gervase Elwes, Francis Harford, and James Campbell McInnes – but professors of singing employed at the London conservatoires of music (including the tenor Dawson Freer, for example, with whom Peter Pears studied at the Royal College of Music, and to whose pedagogical

⁴⁴ See, for example, George Dodds and James Dunlop Lickley, *The Control of the Breath: An Elementary Manual for Singers and Speakers* (London: Humphrey Milford, 1925), in which Dodds, an 'associate of the Royal College of Music, Licentiate of the Royal Academy of Music' collaborated with Lickley, 'M.D., Lecturer on Applied Anatomy, University of Durham College of Medicine'. A discussion of such collaborative studies lies beyond the scope of the current article.

⁴⁵ W. A. Aikin, 'The Society of English Singers', *The Musical Times and Singing-Class Circular*, 57.881 (July, 1916), 319–24.

⁴⁶ William Arthur Aikin, *The Voice: An Introduction to Practical Phonology* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1910). See also the original edition of this text, *The Voice: Its Physiology and Cultivation* (London: Macmillan, 1900). On Aikin's role as a distinguished 'medical-vocal authority' within British musical culture, see Scholes ed., *The Mirror of Music*, vol. 1, 286–7.

texts attention is turned below).⁴⁷ It is of some significance that scholars such as Edward Dent and song composers such as Charles Stanford and Arthur Somervell were also members of this body (Stanford was in fact the Society's first President), which saw a parallel expression in the establishment of The Society for Pure English, also inaugurated during 1913 at the suggestion of Robert Bridges, the Poet Laureate.⁴⁸

The Society of English Singers was established essentially in order to promote improved standards of public vocal performance and, as was outlined in its introductory manifesto, it sought to do so by establishing 'an English school of singing'. Here, an avowedly 'patriotic desire' to see England's conservatoires taking 'a strong line that may place them in the front rank of the singing schools of the world' was baldly declared.⁴⁹ Publishing a series of recommendations for the teaching of singing, the Society urged Britain's music schools to implement changes in their

⁴⁷ For a provocative interpretation of the role played by the Royal conservatoires of music in shaping conceptions of national musical identity, see Hughes and Stradling, *The English Musical Renaissance*.

⁴⁸ On The Society for Pure English, see Brander Matthews, 'A Campaign for Pure English', *The New York Times*, 26 September 1920. Members of the society included Thomas Hardy and Gilbert Murray, as well as Professors of English at various British universities.

⁴⁹ Aikin, 'The Society of English Singers', 319. Aside from this introductory manifesto, I have found no further published articles by the Society of English Singers. Minute-books detailing the titles of papers read at Society meetings, as well as certain policies on vocal teaching discussed at such meetings, are held by Mr Michael Pilkington (the current Treasurer of what is today known as the Association of English Singers and Speakers). These are extant only from the years 1937–1940.

curricula accordingly. It also developed close ties with researchers in the field of elocutionary theory and linguistics, inviting the influential phonologist Professor Daniel Jones to deliver a talk on ‘English Pronunciation in Olden Times’, for example.⁵⁰ Jones, like both folk collectors and classical vocal pedagogues, sought to banish ‘artificiality’ in the production of the voice.⁵¹ Among other papers read at Society meetings were those tellingly entitled ‘Translations’ and ‘Singing in the Vernacular’.⁵²

As was suggested above, the project of recovering a ‘traditional’ English voice reached beyond matters of diction and the pronunciation of English text, however, as was demonstrated by vocalists such as the English Singers. Theirs was a project of mediating the historical performance styles of the ‘early’ English madrigals they brought to public attention.⁵³ Informed by the pioneering research of E. H. Fellowes,

⁵⁰ ‘AESS Annual General Meeting, 1940’, minutes transcribed by Michael Pilkington from archival materials held in his possession. Forwarded to the author on 4 October 2014. On Professor Daniel Jones’s prominence within British elocutionary culture during early years of the twentieth century, see Featherstone, *Englishness*, 142.

⁵¹ See Daniel Jones, *The Pronunciation of English, Phonetics and Phonetic Transcriptions* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1909), vii.

⁵² These papers were read by Dawson Freer: see Denis Dowling, Obituary for Dawson Freer, *Royal College of Music Magazine*, 57.2 (May, 1961), 47.

⁵³ The most comprehensive history of this vocal sextet is found in Sir Steuart Wilson, ‘The English Singers’, *Recorded Sound*, 20 (October, 1965), 375–81. Wilson was a founding member of the group, which made its London debut at the Aeolian Hall on 28 February 1920. Further information may be found in Margaret Stewart, *English Singer: The Life of Steuart Wilson* (London: Duckworth, 1970), 63–72. Edward Dent

the English Singers re-performed the ‘forgotten’ music of ancestral musicians while seated around a table onstage, attempting to reenact the ‘informal’ and ‘natural’ performance practices of that lost ‘Golden Age’ of England’s musical past.⁵⁴ While it has been concluded that unlike the folk movement, ‘Tudor music remained an academic interest, gaining little practical relevance in mass education or popular perception’,⁵⁵ the English Singers appear to have enjoyed considerable popularity and international critical acclaim, securing a recording contract with the Gramophone Company soon after their formation.⁵⁶ The group’s performance practices inspired

played an important role in encouraging the group’s formation, as both sources make clear.

⁵⁴ On the group’s role in demonstrating and popularizing Fellowes’s theories as to the performance of early vocal music, see Edmund H. Fellowes, *Memoirs of an Amateur Musician* (London: Methuen & Co., 1946), 125. Edward Dent challenged popular perceptions that the English Singers had honed a performance style ‘handed down from singer to singer’, underlining in an article published in 1922 that the group’s revivalist performances were instead ‘a protest against bad traditions’, and that these singers ‘brought out the hidden loveliness of our old English composers’ through a deliberate reconstruction underpinned by ‘the scientific erudition of Dr. E. H. Fellowes’. Cited in Stewart, *English Singer*, 70.

⁵⁵ Hughes and Stradling, *The English Musical Renaissance*, 211.

⁵⁶ See Fellowes, *Memoirs of an Amateur Musician*, 125. Benjamin Britten recorded hearing an ‘excellent’ performance by the English Singers upon attending a Promenade concert on September 25th 1930, for example: see John Evans ed., *Journeying Boy: The Diaries of the Young Benjamin Britten 1928–1938* (London: Faber, 2009), 54. Michael Kennedy records that the English Singers accompanied

imitation among many English madrigal groups established during the interwar years, a number of whom adopted the Singers' habit of performing while seated around a table.⁵⁷ With such imitation in mind, it is ironic that Steuart Wilson later publicly confessed that this particular performance practice derived less from the discoveries of Fellowes's research, as from the necessity of finding a solution to a 'practical difficulty' arising from the demands of urban modern living: namely, the problem of transporting music stands across London on the bus.⁵⁸

In purportedly reviving 'ancestral' English voices, the English Singers formed a vocal counterpart to Arnold Dolmetsch, who made 'ancient' instruments for the 'authentic' performance of such music.⁵⁹ Like the English Singers, Dolmetsch was

Adrian Boult on a series of European tours as 'ambassadors' of English music during 1922. See Michael Kennedy, *Adrian Boult* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987), 85–6. For a discography of the English Singers, see *Recorded Sound* 20 (October, 1965), 380–1.

⁵⁷ Fellowes, *Memoirs of an Amateur Musician*, 125. The tenor Peter Pears sang with the New English Singers (as they were known from 1932) between 1936 and 1938, establishing his own madrigal ensembles upon leaving the group, one of which was tellingly named 'The Round Table Singers'. See Philip Reed ed., *The Travel Diaries of Peter Pears 1936–1978* (Woodbridge: Boydell, in conjunction with the Britten-Pears Library, Aldeburgh, 1995), 1–15.

⁵⁸ See Wilson, 'The English Singers', 377.

⁵⁹ See Robert Donington, *The Work and Ideas of Arnold Dolmetsch: The Renaissance of Early Music* (Haslemere: Dolmetsch Foundation, 1932). On Dolmetsch's praise for the work of E. H. Fellowes, and his views on the poor state of vocal performance in England during the early twentieth century, see Christopher Mavson, 'The Dolmetsch

closely aligned with the folk movement,⁶⁰ using his instruments to accompany the performances of Lucy Broadwood, who sang her folk song arrangements in London salons.⁶¹ In turn, Broadwood worked as mentor and vocal coach to prominent classical vocalists such as James Campbell McInnes (to whom a number of early

Circle', *Royal College of Music Magazine*, 24.3 (1925), 89–93, especially 91. It is noteworthy that Robert Bridges, a founding member of the Society for Pure English, was the first president of the Dolmetsch Foundation.

⁶⁰ The English Singers' purported mediation of ancestral voices was undoubtedly bolstered by the way in which they also sang English folk song arrangements, many of which were by Vaughan Williams.

⁶¹ On Lucy Broadwood's interactions with Arnold Dolmetsch, see Dorothy de Val, *In Search of Song: The Life and Times of Lucy Broadwood* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 64–7. As de Val has demonstrated through study of Broadwood's unpublished letters and diaries, Dolmetsch was 'entranced' by her voice, deeming it 'ideal for singing English music up to and including Purcell'. Percy Grainger also became acquainted with Dolmetsch during the 1930s, and praised the vocal performances his daughter Cécile, opining that hers was 'a *naturally* produced voice (as different from that of the conventional concert singer as is a folk-singer's – though different again from this), fresh in all its original girlish lightness and humanity, but used, of course, with high musical skill, consciousness and conscientiousness' (Grainger's emphasis). See Grainger, 'Arnold Dolmetsch: Musical Confucius' (1933), in Michael Gillies and Bruce Clunies Ross eds, *Grainger on Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 240. This description of Cécile Dolmetsch's voice is significant in light of the similar qualities assigned to the ideal singing voice in English vocal pedagogies of the early twentieth century, as is outlined below.

twentieth-century song composers dedicated new compositions).⁶² She also developed a close association with the celebrated bass-baritone Harry Plunket Greene, who had been a founding member of the Folk Song Society in 1898, and who popularized her folk song arrangements widely in London concert halls in the years around the turn of the century.⁶³

Plunket Greene is a figure of particular interest to the present study, for he became a pioneering presence not only in the performance and popularization of art songs by native composers,⁶⁴ but in the promotion of a set of influential ideals for early twentieth-century English vocal performance.⁶⁵ It is to some of the key themes of his pedagogical treatises that I now turn. By teasing out the imagined sound of the ancestral English voice, through investigating its means of production, it becomes

⁶² On Broadwood's close relationship with McInnes, see de Val, *In Search of Song*, 81–4. For songs dedicated to and premiered by McInnes, see Banfield, 'Song Lists', in *Sensibility and English Song*, 407–530.

⁶³ On Broadwood's association with Plunket Greene, see de Val, 'The Transformed Village', 347, and by the same author, *In Search of Song*, 62–4 and 125.

⁶⁴ Percy Scholes credited both Plunket Greene and the tenor Gervase Elwes with a 'pioneering' role in promoting the songs of British composers. See Scholes ed., *The Mirror of Music*, vol. 1, 285–6.

⁶⁵ Stephen Banfield has underlined the powerful impact of Plunket Greene's teachings and manner of performance upon early twentieth-century vocal culture, enforcing Edward Baristow's assertion that 'his influence did more than anything else to revolutionise English singing, and to change it from a bad imitation of the Italian style – largely taught in this country by Italians – to a healthy native art'. See Banfield, *Gerald Finzi*, 34.

possible to explore how the voices of pre-modern singers were purportedly mediated through practices of classical vocal performance. This nourishes, in turn, a rich and novel understanding of how English musicians sought to recover and define distinctive modes of English musical expression, communication, and creation during these years.

Producing the English Voice: A Journey Through Song

In October 1926, Harry Plunket Greene gave a series of three radio talks on singing for the BBC.⁶⁶ Here, he imagined the rediscovery of an English voice in terms that staged an ironic dialogue with the mass medium through which he transmitted his discussion: the radio, a very symbol of a modernity he strove to mitigate in the recovery of a vocal vernacular. Plunket Greene sought, like Dent, to return the voice

⁶⁶ Harry Plunket Greene, *Three Short Talks on Singing given for the British Broadcasting Company at their London Station* (London: Stainer & Bell, 1926). Born in Ireland in 1865, Harry Plunket Greene became renowned as a recital singer, rising to prominence when he performed the title role in the premiere of Parry's oratorio *Job* at the Three Choirs Festival in 1892. In 1899, he married Parry's daughter Gwendolen. He was widely known as an exponent of twentieth-century English art song, and also became a celebrated vocal pedagogue, teaching both at the Royal College and Royal Academy of Music before his death in 1936. His cornerstone text, *Interpretation in Song* (London: Macmillan, 1912), was reprinted eleven times between 1913 and 1948. For a detailed biographical account, see Harry Plunket Greene in the Hurstbourne Priors Website, <http://www.plunketgreene.hampshire.org.uk>.

to an essential, ‘pre-modern’, and ‘natural’ state, for as he repeated as a guiding mantra to the English singer: ‘the highest art is to conceal art’.⁶⁷ This cultivated ‘artless’ state was to be clear in the facial expressions and bodily postures of the singer, as much as in the delivery of the voice. As Plunket Greene had earlier underlined in his influential text *Interpretation in Song*, singing must be an

unconscious response to the play of [the singer’s] feeling [...]
All such physical response, and all facial expression, should
be unconscious and automatic; for the very idea of artificiality
is abhorrent.⁶⁸

This ‘unconscious’, embodied naturalness was a condition of a particular innocence. As Plunket Greene explained:

we sing by nature when we are children and have to learn to
speak, but as we grow up and self-consciousness takes
possession of us these positions are reversed; speech becomes
so much of a habit as to be practically spontaneous, while
singing has to be learnt.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Plunket Greene, *Three Short Talks on Singing*, 2. On the notion of ‘hidden artifice’ in aesthetics of early twentieth-century English song composition, see Jeremy Dibble, “‘Hidden Artifice’: Howells as Song-Writer”, in *The Music of Herbert Howells*, ed. Phillip Cooke and David Maw (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2013), 62–85.

⁶⁸ Plunket Greene, *Interpretation in Song*, 16.

⁶⁹ Plunket Greene, *Three Short Talks on Singing*, 1.

The recovery of an ‘earlier’, innocent, spontaneous, and unconscious voice – a voice of pre-literate childhood – was directed in turn towards enacting ‘the sympathetic force with which audience and singer hold one another’, for as Plunket Greene maintained, the function of the voice, ‘from time immemorial’, was ‘to give a message from man to man without proxy’.⁷⁰ To this end, he reminded the performer that at all times, ‘singer and audience sing, in reality, together in sympathy’,⁷¹ and in the second of his radio talks (during a discussion of rhythmic pulse), he illustrated such ‘sympathetic’ singing in hearing by staging a provocative invitation to singer and listener alike, in a performance of Arthur Somervell’s arrangement of the folk song ‘All Through the Night’, as follows:

When Mr. Liddle starts the opening symphony [the piano’s introduction], I want you to get in step with him and walk forward in slow march time. I will join you immediately and we will all go forward together. I have really been walking with you the whole time but do not become obstreperous till the fifth bar. Take a line at random, say: ‘Hill and dale in slumber steeping’ and notice how the ‘ll’ of ‘hill’ jumps on to the ‘a’ of ‘and’ and pushes it forward [...] and so on.

I have to call your attention to it, for if I didn’t you would never notice it. All you would feel would be that we were all three moving on in rhythmic pulses in a straight line to the

⁷⁰ Plunket Greene, *Three Short Talks on Singing*, 1.

⁷¹ Plunket Greene, *Interpretation in Song*, 37.

end, and that we never once paused or looked back.⁷²

Plunket Greene's ostensibly idiosyncratic directives to the singer are worth recounting extensively in this way, for they highlight a series of themes that feature persistently in vocal pedagogies of the early twentieth century. His idealized vision of a community bound together through the sound of an 'unconscious', 'natural' singing voice reflected not only the characterization of folk music and folk performance by figures such as Cecil Sharp,⁷³ but it also mediated the ethos of such folklorists more broadly. As Richard Sykes has assessed, '[t]he aim of the [folk] movement was to help effect, through a common musical idiom, a shared collective consciousness [...]'.⁷⁴ This promotion of ties between members of the 'home community' was the expression of a particular kind of nationalism, drawing strength from 'perceptions of shared experiences both past and present.'⁷⁵

⁷² Plunket Greene, *Three Short Talks on Singing*, 15–16.

⁷³ Sharp credited the non-literate folk singer with the 'unconscious output' of a 'real', 'sincere', and 'communal' expression in his *Conclusions*. See *English Folk-Song*, 32–5.

⁷⁴ Sykes, 'The Evolution of Englishness', 471.

⁷⁵ Sykes, 'The Evolution of Englishness', 471. As Sykes elaborates, '[t]here is an assurance of simultaneous activity within the boundaries of the shared culture. At any one time, the singer of folk songs may feel certain that the experience is, or could be, shared at the same moment by any or all of his or her compatriots'. This idea of an 'imagined community' is derived from Benedict Anderson's influential study *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

By associating the singing voice with both innocence and the landscape – with an act of journey through a space, the ‘hill and dale’ of Somervell’s folk song arrangement – Plunket Greene also drew upon the contemporary travelogue genre, in which narratives of rural journey and exploration promised the rediscovery of a lost and idealized English past.⁷⁶ Such narratives and journeys lay at the heart of the rural movement from which the folk revival drew its impetus. The imagining of song as a rural landscape in which to search for musical meaning and inspiration, and through which a pre-modern English voice could be recovered, was a persistent focus within a number of early twentieth-century vocal pedagogies, as will be demonstrated below.⁷⁷ As such, the English voice became a site upon which community was imagined and

⁷⁶ For a discussion of the ‘invention’ of rural England through ideas of its exploration and rediscovery, see Colls, ‘Journeys’, in *Identity of England*, 258–72. For a sourcebook of early twentieth-century narratives of rural journey and exploration, see ‘Versions of Rural England’, in *Writing Englishness, 1900–1950: An Introductory Sourcebook on National Identity*, ed. Judy Giles and Tim Middleton (London: Routledge, 1995), 73–109.

⁷⁷ An emphasis upon the act of journey in singing was a powerful point of focus for Plunket Greene’s vocal teaching, as one of his students at the Royal College of Music recalled following his death. Margaret McVeagh explained that ‘Plunkie [sic.] [...] usually stood at the bottom of the grand piano while he taught, but occasionally he leaned on it, as he loved to show, not only with his voice, but by making his fingers walk directly across the piano, exactly what he meant by wanting phrases sung in a straight line [...] Again and again he would say, “Do without your jaw; sing *across* your mouth [...]”’ (emphasis mine). See Margaret McVeagh, ‘Memories of Harry Plunket Greene’, *Royal College of Music Magazine*, 57.2 (May, 1961), 31.

enacted, as vocalists – like composers – were ‘returned to the land’ in order to secure the future of national music.

Like the tales of rural adventure that emerged during the early decades of the twentieth century, texts concerning the production of the voice emerged most intensively during the interwar years. While some vocal pedagogies appear to have been aimed primarily at students for whom singing was a relatively serious pursuit, others emerging during this period include those such as Walter Twinning’s *The Amateur Vocalist: A Guide to Singing with Useful Hints on Voice Production, Song Interpretation, etc*,⁷⁸ or Madge Wells’s *Singers! A Word! Allow Me!*,⁷⁹ both of which were aimed at the very beginner, displaying a transparent and accessible language. Such texts formed part of the music education movement, as music making and appreciation – like rural exploration and discovery – became accessible and popular leisure pursuits.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Walter S. Twinning, *The Amateur Vocalist: A Guide to Singing with Useful Hints on Voice Production, Song Interpretation, etc* (London: William Reeves, 1931).

⁷⁹ Madge Wells, *Singers! A Word! Allow Me!* (London: Cary & Co., 1931).

⁸⁰ For a study of music’s development as a recreational pursuit, see Dave Russell, *Popular Music in England, 1840–1914: A Social History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987). It should be noted here that the cultural politics of the ‘English voice’ were complex, and a detailed elaboration of these issues lies beyond the scope of the current article. As Laura Tunbridge has pointed out, the practices of ‘standard English’ or ‘received pronunciation’ nourished by English elocutionists of this period purportedly promoted social cohesion through the neutrality of a non-localized accent. In reality, the voices upon which such English was modelled, however, were those of the educated elite. See Tunbridge, ‘Singing Translations’, 61.

Regardless of the intended consumer, vocal pedagogies promoted broadly consistent ideas about the production of an English voice. The kind of voice encouraged was, as H. Travers Adams put it, ‘a vocal sound possessing perfect firmness, solidity, depth, volume, penetration, power and beauty – a real honest, robust, enduring, seasoned voice [...]’⁸¹ Voice production was here defined as ‘a special branch of the great art of singing’, which involved ‘the planning, the building up of, and then the playing upon a perfect musical instrument’.⁸²

As related to the ‘unconscious naturalness’ coveted in English singing, some controversy emerged as to whether it was ‘unwise to attempt to instruct the student in the anatomy and physiology of the respiratory and vocal organs’.⁸³ Plunket Greene often castigated ‘vocal charlatans’, objecting that the ‘breathing faddist’, or ‘scientific’ pedagogue, interfered with the ‘natural’ voice production. As he insisted:

Singing is the finest natural exercise in the word. It may be hard to separate cause and effect, but the fact remains that public singers, in spite of late hours, bad air, nervous strain, and a life spent in trains and hotels are, as a rule,

As is suggested in the present study, the emphasis placed upon democratic education and participation in numerous discourses surrounding the singing voice makes clear that the politics of the ‘English voice’ demand further attention.

⁸¹ H. Travers Adams, *The ‘Central Point’ in Beautiful Voice Production* (London: William Reeves, 1926), 3.

⁸² Adams, *The ‘Central Point’ in Beautiful Voice Production*, 4.

⁸³ Dodds and Lickley, *The Control of the Breath*, vii.

unwarrantably and disgustingly healthy [...] The English singer is as sound a good fellow in mind as he is in body. It is not the faddist who has made singing the finest exercise in the world; it is Nature. She has told all living things to breathe in the way that gives them least trouble.⁸⁴

This construction of the English singer as ‘a sound good fellow’, healthy in body and mind, stakes an important claim for a ‘natural’ mode of native singing. Such a voice, like the rural spaces of the countryside, was promoted as the source of physical and psychological health: a remedy to the ‘bad air’ and ‘nervous strain’ experienced by singers in increasingly modernized conditions. Ironically, this ‘natural’ voice was promoted by the very ‘breathing faddists’ for whom Plunket Greene has such disdain, as a broad range of discourses found common ground in their emphasis upon the communicative capacity of an ‘honest’, ‘healthy’, and ‘spontaneous’ utterance.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Plunket Greene, *Interpretation in Song*, 289–90. In spite of Plunket Greene’s appeal to science, there simultaneously emerged a widespread anxiety towards the ‘scientific’ vocal pedagogue during the first part of the twentieth century and beyond. The ‘pseudo-science’ of ‘rival theories’ continued to concern commentators such as Sydney Northcote in his discussion of an ‘English style of singing’ in 1966, for example. See Northcote, *Byrd to Britten*, 21. It was perhaps to such theories that Vaughan Williams made reference in his correspondence with Cecil Sharp, cited above.

⁸⁵ As social historian Jose Harris has noted, anxiety about ‘physical deterioration’ was endemic in Britain from the 1880s onwards, as a consciousness of modernity and of a ‘lost domain’ became a persistent preoccupation. See Harris, *Private Lives, Public*

As such, singing was imagined as a natural extension of speech: a form of heightened, direct, communicative speech, accessible and intelligible to all. In the first part of his article ‘The Future of the English Song’, Plunket Greene stressed that

[s]ong is to man, if he did but know it, as natural as speech.

Scientific research has revealed to us the fact that every normal child has music in him and a voice wherewith to give it life [...] singing can be learned in youth as easily as speech [...] [t]he one to be pitied is he who has allowed one of Nature’s most beautiful endowments to perish from atrophy.⁸⁶

Harry Gregory Hast, a professor of singing at the Guildhall School of Music and longstanding member of the Society of English Singers, expressed a comparable belief in the communicative voice, emphasizing that singing was ‘glorified speech’. He too insisted upon a particular notion of ‘naturalness’ in English singing:

Spirit: Britain 1870–1914 (1993; London: Penguin Books, 1994), 33–4. Interwar vocal pedagogies often displayed a specific preoccupation with respiratory disease and degeneracy: see, for example, Plunket Greene, *Three Short Talks on Singing*, 5. It seems likely that such concerns derived in part from a widespread awareness of the impact of chemical warfare upon the respiratory organs of those who fought during the First World War: see, for example, ‘Gas’, in Stephen Pope and Elizabeth-Anne Wheal, *The Macmillan Dictionary of the First World War* (London: Macmillan, 1995), 187–8. As Pope and Wheal underline, ‘hundreds of thousands of injured victims lived truncated, disabled lives into the postwar era’.

⁸⁶ Plunket Greene, ‘The Future of the English Song: I The Singer and the Public’, 19.

Many people approach the act of singing as a tremendous business. It is quite a usual thing to see a singer walk to the piano in a perfectly easy, natural and graceful manner, and then, just before the song begins, the body stiffens, the arms become rigid, the hands, perhaps, clenched tightly, the face and jaw and throat and the whole box of tricks become set fast, a frown makes its appearance, and a look of dull solemnity takes the place of the bright and natural smile. The singer is making the awful, though silent, announcement, ‘Ladies and Gentlemen, I am about to sing’. Why all the fuss? How much better it would be if he would retain his natural ease and attitude, and simply open his mouth and sing. The ease and naturalness of the performance is half the battle, and the message of the song will go straight to the hearts of the listeners if it is unhampered by the whole cargo of unnecessary contortions [...]⁸⁷

An emphasis upon the natural delivery of the voice as an extension of unaffected physical deportment was prominent in such manuals.⁸⁸ Significantly, this was a characteristic of folk performance lauded by Cecil Sharp. In *Folk-Singing in Schools*, for example, he had reminded teachers that ‘folk-songs are sung not only without

⁸⁷ Harry Gregory Hast, *The Singer’s Art: Letters from a Singing Master* (London: Methuen & Co., 1925), 16–17.

⁸⁸ See, for example, Twinning, *The Amateur Vocalist*, 3.

gesture, but with the greatest restraint in the matter of expression; indeed, the folk-singer will usually close his eyes and preserve an impassive demeanour throughout his performance'.⁸⁹

The Reverend William Charles Gib, a vocal trainer and authority on the art of voice production, looked explicitly to 'nature' in order to inspire a voice free from 'artificiality' and 'self-consciousness', and designed for 'the purpose of the enactment of a spiritual and embodied communion between men'. As he maintained,

The great art of manifesting our thoughts and feelings through the voice, brings soul face to face with soul, and causes us to lose sight of the means by which thoughts cross from one to another [...] You have nature close at hand to study: you have divine instincts throbbing in your breasts which need spontaneous expression.⁹⁰

Gib's emphasis upon an 'unconscious' mode of self-expression is suggestive of a persistent preoccupation with ideas of the folkloristic voice, as much as its perceived role in binding communities together. Dawson Freer imagined the building of community through English singing in similar terms, advising that a performer must learn to 'sense' an audience, and that the experienced vocalist

⁸⁹ Sharp, *Folk-Singing in Schools*, 18.

⁹⁰ Charles Gib, *Vocal Success, or Thinking and Feeling in Speech and Song, including a Chapter on Ideal Breathing for Health* (London: William Reeves, 1922) 67–8.

almost unconsciously adapts himself to [the audience's]
understanding [...] The sensation of being in sympathy with
an audience is a feeling of being at one with it. For an emotion
experienced simultaneously by two or more people is a fire
which melts their individualities and fuses them into one
entity.⁹¹

The notion that singing should form a bond 'from heart to heart' with a listener had its origins in vocal pedagogies produced in England during the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth centuries.⁹² Pedagogies of the early twentieth century marked a departure from earlier models in their negotiations of vocal community, however, to the extent that they engaged a revivalist rhetoric derived from contemporaneous reformations and performances of English identity, especially ideas of the rural landscape as a place in which both to discover but also to contain individual creative inspiration, emotional expression, and the forging of community through embodied musical communication.

For example, Plunket Greene imagined the countryside as a place in which to break free of the strictures of 'the Victorian era'. As he maintained,

Self-consciousness [is] unfortunately a commonplace of the
English singer. Englishmen are noted for their reserve [...]
O for a fire to cremate the starched collar, and a rude north

⁹¹ Dawson Freer, *The Teaching of Interpretation in Song: A Guide for Teachers and Students* (London: Evans Brothers, 1924), 90–1.

⁹² See Robert Toft, *Heart to Heart: Expressive Singing in England 1780–1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), especially ix–xii.

wind to scatter the cheap conventions!⁹³

The ‘rude north wind’ becomes a powerful antidote to the ‘cheap conventions’ of the ‘Victorian’ singer, whose excessive emotional reserve is here denigrated (though this figure is elsewhere ridiculed by Plunket Greene as a flamboyant, Italianate effeminate, the antidote to whom becomes the English singer armed with ‘rod and gun’).⁹⁴ The expression and simultaneous control of musical ‘fire’, or emotion, was of grave importance, as Dawson Freer elaborated in a chapter entitled ‘The Liberation of the Emotions’. Here, he maintained that the student vocalist

must be persuaded to let themselves feel and then taught how
to control those feelings, for without control there is no

⁹³ Plunket Greene, *Interpretation in Song*, 35–6.

⁹⁴ Plunket Greene, ‘The Future of the English Song: I The Singer and the Public’, 19.

It is provocative that Stuart Wilson later described Plunket Greene as just such an English singer, recalling in 1968 that he was ‘very good looking, though not like an artist, like an outdoor man [...]’. See Stuart Wilson, ‘Harry Plunket Greene’, *Recorded Sound*, 32 (October, 1968), 327. Byron Adams has pointed out that by associating music with the countryside, early twentieth-century British musicians were able to escape the emotional restrictions of Victorianism while containing the dangerous erotic connotations of aestheticism and decadence, especially in the years following the trials of Oscar Wilde. See Adams, “‘No Armpits, Please, We’re British’: Whitman and English Music, 1884–1936’, in *Walt Whitman and Modern Music: War, Desire, and the Trials of Nationhood*, ed. Lawrence Kramer (New York: Garland, 2000), 25–42.

proportion kept, and the keeping of proportion is the creation of form.⁹⁵

Later in this text, Freer elaborated upon the dangers of emotional abandon, equating excessive and uncontrolled musical emotion – both in song composition and in performance – with bad taste, and warning that ‘sound without sense’ engendered ‘physical excitement through sound vibrations’. As he continued,

[t]o feed the emotions and to starve the intellect has the usual dangerous result of poisoning sound judgement and letting loose undisciplined emotions. True art is not violent in its appeal, but persuasive; for art is a union of intellectual form and emotional expression, and it is the former that prevents the latter from becoming hysteria [...]⁹⁶

Freer’s warning against ‘hysteria’ betrays a contemporaneous cultural anxiety towards the association of the human voice both with excessive emotion and with sexual pleasure.⁹⁷ The

⁹⁵ Freer, *The Teaching of Interpretation in Song*, 25.

⁹⁶ Freer, *The Teaching of Interpretation in Song*, 58. As Steuart Wilson put it, ‘there is a necessity I admit of keeping a good deal of intellectual ballast if one is to carry much emotional sail for fear of capsizing altogether’. Cited in Stewart, *English Singer*, 45.

⁹⁷ The notion of hysteria possessed both erotic and gendered connotations at this time, in part as related to the writings of Freud. For an illuminating study of hysteria and the hysterical voice in English and broader European cultural and literary

tension inherent in an ‘intellectual’ and rational voice that was at the same time to be ‘unconscious’ and embodied was clear between and within numerous pedagogies.

Indeed, the English voice simultaneously required the exploration and the containment of the singer’s body. As Charles Kennedy Scott emphasized in *Word and Tone: An English Method of Vocal Technique for Solo Singers and Choralists*, vocal tone was to be drawn from the very physicality of the body, for ‘a note does not really *live* till it has registered spiritual feeling and intensity’. A ‘good note’, as he maintained, is ‘an emotion, a strenuous breath, not so many vibrations to the second [...] Feeling is the only thing that really cements notes together’.⁹⁸ As he continued,

[t]he problem of singing is to join up the voice as an
instrument with the personality of the singer [...] ⁹⁹

imagination, see Claire Kahane, *Passions of the Voice: Hysteria, Narrative, and the Figure of the Speaking Woman, 1850–1915* (Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995). An examination of the pervasive constructions of gender elaborated throughout texts such as those of Plunket Greene lie beyond the scope of this article. For a discussion of the masculinizing of British music during this period, see Byron Adams, “‘No Armpits, Please’”, 25–42.

⁹⁸ Charles Kennedy Scott, *Word and Tone: An English Method of Vocal Technique for Solo Singers and Choralists, etc.*, 2 vols. (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1933), vol.1, 124. Harry Haskell credits Kennedy Scott with ‘keeping alive’ the English madrigal tradition through founding and training the Oriana Madrigal Society with Thomas Beecham in 1904. See Haskell, *The Early Music Revival: A History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), 36.

⁹⁹ Kennedy Scott, *Word and Tone*, vol. 1, 130.

Notes should have a bony structure; they should not be just
flesh and fat, though these softer substances can, as it were,
clothe the hard framework of the sound.¹⁰⁰

Ideas of the nation itself as a ‘living body’ were prevalent throughout the years under discussion. Arthur Mee, for example, advocated ‘The Great Truth that a Nation is like a Living Body’ in his *Children’s Encyclopaedia*, reminding the reader that ‘we are members of one another [...] Each one of us is part of a great whole’.¹⁰¹ Such conceptions illuminate a powerful context in which to situate discourses surrounding the English singing voice. Yet, and as was suggested above, the proposition that fortifying a nation through building community necessitated becoming ‘members of one another’ elicited caution from vocal pedagogues. It was upon the dual sites of childhood and of the countryside that this voice was to be both rediscovered and contained.¹⁰²

For example, Plunket Greene’s evocation of a ‘rude north wind’ can be related to his frequent discussion of the ‘fairy-land’ to be ‘discovered’ by the singer in the

¹⁰⁰ Kennedy Scott, *Word and Tone*, vol.1, 133.

¹⁰¹ See Arthur Henry Mee, ‘The Nation is a Living Body’, in *Writing Englishness*, ed. Giles and Middleton, 63–5, from Volume 9 of *The Children’s Encyclopaedia* (published fortnightly from 1908).

¹⁰² As Linda M. Austin points out, childhood and the countryside were two key sites upon which late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British culture collectively and publicly negotiated the consumption and representation of the past and its role in the present. See Austin, *Nostalgia in Transition 1780–1917* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2007), especially 3.

study and subsequent performance of a song. The singer's journey through a song's landscape was imagined at the very opening of his 1912 text, in which he characterized the vocalist as a 'pioneer', as follows:

There is a fascination about the pioneer; he carries romance in his very name [...] To explore the unexplored, to 'walk out toward the unknown region', to win the secrets of the earth by force of arms have been the dream of boy and man from time immemorial. As with Nature, so with Art. Song has her dark continents and virgin peaks waiting to be conquered, and when they call, the pioneer must be up and doing.¹⁰³

This charting and conquering of the song's landscape led not only to the containment of the body in the land, but to the discovery of musical meaning and creative inspiration, as the following discussion of musical 'atmosphere' suggests:

Every song has an *Atmosphere* of its own; that is, a something all-pervading to which all detail is subordinate [...] It follows that every song must be treated as a *whole*. The composer wrote it as a whole; the singer must sing it as a whole. A musical phrase is made up of a number of notes. The singer does not think of these notes separately; he thinks of the phrase as a whole, and the song is to the phrase what the phrase is to the note [...] If the singer has imagination,

¹⁰³ Plunket Greene, *Interpretation in Song*, 3–4.

atmosphere will come to meet him half-way. Its fascination
will lure him on and lead him into fairy-land. A thousand feet
may have worn the path bare before him, but to him all is
virgin soil [...]¹⁰⁴

The implication of the singer's body in the landscape of a song completes a process of performing man's return to the land, as songs became a place where 'for every treasure [the singer] discovers he knows the earth to hold a thousand more'.¹⁰⁵ The spatial quality of the song – its soundscape and expressive realm – was to be 'imprinted' in the body, as much as mapped as a place to search for musical meaning and thus, interpretative inspiration. The forward movement of the phrase, for example, and the communication of a particular relation between notes, was crucial to such discovery, as was the treatment of the song as a series of parts which make up a 'whole'.

Like Plunket Greene, Harry Gregory Hast imagined song as a land of rural discovery, and specifically as a 'fairyland' of lost beauty. In his chapter on interpretation in song, he began with the following invitation to the road:

[t]he path to be trodden by the artist gifted with the power of
interpretation runs through fairyland and will reveal to him at
every turn new beauties and opportunities for expressing
them. It is a land unknown to the mere vocalist. It is the thing

¹⁰⁴ Plunket Greene, *Interpretation in Song*, 13–14 (Plunket Greene's emphasis).

¹⁰⁵ Plunket Greene, *Interpretation in Song*, 2.

that makes singing worth while to one with limited vocal powers.¹⁰⁶

‘Fairyland’ connoted both escapist fantasy and lost innocence, and was a well-established Victorian and Edwardian topic.¹⁰⁷ Such metaphors also engage later twentieth-century constructions of rural exploration and retreat. In Hubert Brown’s study, for example, the discovery and communication of the song’s basic shape – its climaxes and structural terrain – was imagined as an act of ‘walking up a steep hill, the top of which appears to be the highest point to be reached; but on reaching this top, we find a sudden short dip, followed by another hill, rising above the first [...]’ The ‘summits’ of these hills, as Brown underlined, offered moments of interpretative enlightenment: the creative discoveries and vocal triumphs of a singer’s journey.¹⁰⁸

While such themes represent but a preliminary introduction to a vast range of discourses concerning vocal performance and pedagogy that emerged in England during the early twentieth century, they nevertheless provide a powerful new lens onto ideas of musical expression, community, and identity during this period of

¹⁰⁶ Hast, *The Singer’s Art*, 65.

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, Jason Marc Harris, *Folklore and the Fantastic in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

¹⁰⁸ Hubert Brown, *The Principles of Expression in Song* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1928), 55–6. As Simon Featherstone has assessed, interwar rural journeying was ideally to be unplanned and lacking any specific premise. Implicitly, however, such journeys were undertaken with a view to rediscovering the lost and ‘secret’ England of the countryside. See Featherstone, *Englishness*, 67.

musical revival. In particular, such discourses facilitate a novel perspective from which to consider how the voice became a contested site upon which musical culture mediated broader notions of social and cultural change and regeneration, especially in relation to the rural movement. The project of returning man to the land in order to secure the survival of the nation¹⁰⁹ represented a point of focus for the divergent compositional styles developed by British composers at this time: a complex musical category that has problematically been described as the ‘historical-pastoral’.¹¹⁰ Stringent attempts to unpack this category have sustained a particularly influential body of research in the field of recent British music studies.¹¹¹ With this in mind, the current article presents not only a series of unexplored constructions through which ‘song’ and ‘voice’ were situated at the heart of English musical revival but, by unearthing such constructions, provides a fresh point of departure from which to assess the pervasive and complex presence of the rural in early twentieth-century performances of musical Englishness.

¹⁰⁹ See Howkins, ‘The Discovery of Rural England’, 66–7.

¹¹⁰ Hughes and Stradling, *The English Musical Renaissance*, 74–82.

¹¹¹ See Daniel M. Grimley, ‘Landscape and Distance: Vaughan Williams, Modernism and the Symphonic Pastoral’, in *British Music and Modernism 1895–1960*, ed. Matthew Riley (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), and Eric Saylor, “‘It’s Not Lambkins Frisking at All’: English Pastoral Music and the Great War’, *The Musical Quarterly*, 91.1–2 (Spring-Summer, 2008).

Songs of English Voices: Vaughan Williams's 'Silent Noon'

As has been posited above, early twentieth-century British musicians frequently imagined the making of an English voice – both literally, in performance, and figuratively, in composition – in terms of an idealized collaborative project, one shared between composer, singer, and even listener. Such ideas were fundamental to Ralph Vaughan Williams's musical aesthetics and to his project for national music, as I shall briefly note below, before offering by way of conclusion a series of reflections upon his song, 'Silent Noon'. Here, categories of voice, performance, memory, landscape, and community are subtly negotiated. By considering this classic of the English song repertoire in light of a contemporaneous culture of vocal performance and pedagogy, I seek to consider how invoking this fresh context might provoke new questions about early twentieth-century English art songs. As such, what follows necessarily represents a series of notes to further research.

'Silent Noon' was premiered in 1903, though was likely composed in 1902.¹¹² Vaughan Williams's biographer Ursula Vaughan Williams relates that by way of preparation for the first series of lectures he delivered on the subject of folk song in 1902, he had undertaken a course of lessons in 'voice production', having already sought out training in singing.¹¹³ Plunket Greene popularized 'Silent Noon' both in

¹¹² For full details of the composition, publication, and early performance history of 'Silent Noon', see Michael Kennedy, *A Catalogue of the Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 2nd edn. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 17 and 24–5.

¹¹³ Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R. V. W.: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 60.

his pedagogical texts and on the concert platform,¹¹⁴ and a series of remarks made when discussing vocal performance suggest that Vaughan Williams was intimately familiar with his teachings.¹¹⁵ He was also convinced of the extent to which the performance practices of particular singers could inspire compositional choices,¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Vaughan Williams dedicated his song cycle *Songs of Travel* to Plunket Greene in 1905. This cycle was composed alongside *The House of Life* (from which ‘Silent Noon’ is drawn) between 1901 and 1904. See Kennedy, *A Catalogue of the Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 24–6.

¹¹⁵ Upon hearing a performance of his *Toward the Unknown Region* given by the Leith Hill Festival Chorus in 1954, for example, Vaughan Williams wrote with words of congratulation to the choir, remarking that theirs was ‘truly the art which conceals art’. While working with Gustav Holst on the latter’s opera *The Wandering Scholar* during 1930, he criticized the singing of numerous cast members, complaining ‘is there no way of preserving that *natural* singing and yet getting the voice big enough?’ (Vaughan Williams’s emphasis). See *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1895–1958*, ed. Hugh Cobbe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 544 and 184–5, respectively. It should be noted that Vaughan Williams also criticized Plunket Greene’s ‘small tone’ in this letter to Holst. As Sophie Fuller has pointed out, tenors Gervase Elwes and Steuart Wilson also became closely associated with Vaughan Williams’s songs: see ‘The songs and shorter secular choral works’, 114 and 117. For more on Vaughan Williams’s views on singing, see ‘Gervase Elwes’ (1921), in *Vaughan Williams on Music*, ed. David Manning (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹¹⁶ Vaughan Williams emphasized the role played by the tenor Gervase Elwes in the development of Roger Quilter’s approach to song composition, for example, asserting

and like numerous proponents of national musical revival, Vaughan Williams imagined the composer as a singer (often as a folk singer).¹¹⁷ Perhaps the central tenet of his project for national music, moreover, was a belief in the fundamental importance of music making to the emergence of a distinctive compositional style.¹¹⁸ Indeed, he asserted many times that the future of a national music lay in a collaborative exchange between composer and performer: as he outlined in his important article ‘The Letter and the Spirit’,

a musical composition when invented is only half finished,
and until actual sound is produced that composition *does not*
exist. How then is the musical composer to make his invention
live in actual sound? [...] he must seek out others who are

that ‘[i]f it be true that singers found their style on some particular composer, the converse is equally true, and there can be no doubt that the graceful and refined music of Roger Quilter owes its inspiration largely to the exquisite style and perfect phrasing of Gervase Elwes’. See Vaughan Williams, ‘Gervase Elwes’, 59.

¹¹⁷ In the conclusions to his influential lectures ‘National Music’ (1932), for example, he insisted that ‘[u]ntil our music becomes a really spontaneous expression, first of ourselves, next of our community [...] in fact until it is as unpremeditated as that of the folk-singer, it will not be vital’. Vaughan Williams, *National Music and Other Essays*, 2nd repr. edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 64.

¹¹⁸ As he declared, ‘[w]hen England has its municipal-aided music, so that every town of decent size possesses its own permanent orchestra as is the case in Germany, we shall have conductors of our own, and with increased musical activity our composers will grow’. Cited in Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R. V. W.*, 63.

capable of making the sounds he desires [...] (Vaughan Williams's emphasis).¹¹⁹

'Silent Noon' has often been somewhat vaguely associated with ideas of voice, memory, phenomenology, and performance.¹²⁰ As Stephen Banfield has put it, the 'deliberately episodic' nature of the song's construction works such that it

¹¹⁹ Vaughan Williams, 'The Letter and the Spirit', in *National Music and Other Essays*, 123. In 1912, Vaughan Williams had made explicit reference to an idealized notion of the multiple musical voices of a community national music, affirming that '[w]hen English people realize this – that the composer is their own voice speaking through his art those things they can only dimly grope for – then indeed the English composer will be wanted [...]'. See 'Who Wants the English Composer?', in *Vaughan Williams on Music*, 40. For a further discussion of the multiple, performative voices projected by Vaughan Williams's works, and his music's self-conscious staging of acts both of singing and hearing see my doctoral thesis, 'Vaughan Williams, Song, and the Idea of "Englishness"'.

¹²⁰ See George R. Tibbetts, 'Culture and the Sublime: Ralph Vaughan Williams's *The House of Life* as an Expression of English Experience', in *The Poetry of Life in Literature*, ed. Anna-Therese Tymieniecka, The Yearbook of Phenomenological Research (London: Kluwer Academic, 2000), 179–85. Phyllis Weliver discusses ideas of voice, music, and performance in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's 'sonnet sequence' *The House of Life*, from which Vaughan Williams drew texts for his eponymous song cycle. See Weliver, 'The "Silent Song" of D. G. Rossetti's *The House of Life*', in *The Figure of Music in Nineteenth-Century British Poetry*, ed. Phyllis Weliver (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

conveys, finally, ‘the realization of a moment held forever in the present tense of memory’.¹²¹ Banfield refers to the way in which the opening material of ‘Silent Noon’ returns at its conclusion. The song begins with a brief prelude in the piano, outlining the melodic contour of the subsequent vocal entry (Example 1, bb. 1–3, beat 1). The effect is such that the piano gently coaxes the entry of the voice, as the complex generic signal – part barcarolle, part berceuse – creates a sense of tension, heightened by the metrical syncopation (which pushes gently against the crotchet beat and pushes towards the end of each bar). Plunket Greene described this opening as one of ‘heat-haze and human throb’,¹²² and as is implied in this characterization, ‘Silent Noon’'s opening seems to beat with the heart, evoking a sense of ritualistic dwelling in the landscape, and enacting (rather than describing) the present-tense experience of union both with a beloved – and with nature – that is described by the song’s poetic voice.

Thereafter, a harmonically exploratory middle section ensues (Examples 2 and 3, bb. 19–60), in which a series of common-tone modulations convey musical shifts of consciousness, corresponding again to the poetic persona’s experience of an unfolding landscape experience (see Example 2, bb. 38–9, for example). The musical progress of this second section communicates a powerful evocation of restless exploration, or musical journey: a series of ‘climbing’ gestures that are evocative of Hubert Brown’s direction to the performer’s exploration of a song’s space by traversing its various ‘hills’, the top of which promise moments of creative enlightenment.

¹²¹ Banfield, *Sensibility and English Song*, 80.

¹²² Plunket Greene, *Interpretation in Song*, 2. The intimation of sexual tension in this characterization is both implicit and unmistakable.

Finally, a joyous return of the opening musical material at bar 61 brings ultimately a sudden shift, in the poetry, from the ecstatic present tense to a past-tense narration, in a reflection upon all that has been heard thus far (see Example 3). Dante Gabriel Rossetti's text at this moment reads as follows:

Oh! clasp we to our hearts, for deathless dower
This close-companion'd inarticulate hour,
When twofold silence was the song of love.

The textual change to the past tense in the final words of 'Silent Noon' suggests that a different voice, a narrating voice, has entered here, reflecting upon an earlier moment where 'two-fold silence *was* the song of love' (emphasis mine). In its sudden shift to a reflection upon the past, the poetic voice confirms that what has been heard thus far in the song is just that: a 'song'. The corresponding octave shift in the musical setting to a literally different register with the word 'song', as the accompaniment grinds to a halt, calls attention to the very quality of voice itself (see Example 3, bb. 69–71). As such, this moment highlights an act of sounding, the presence of a performer.¹²³

This is enforced by the way in which the exclamation of the poetic voice's 'Oh' is given actual voice by the singer in Vaughan Williams's musical setting, at precisely the moment at which the opening music returns (see Example 3, b. 61). This is an exclamation of recognition. The delayed cadential closure on 'song of love' (Example 3, bb. 72–3), as the text moves to the past tense, refers back to the long-held

¹²³ Carolyn Abbate might call such a moment the projection of a 'voice-object': see *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 10.

scale degree 5 on ‘-bove’ (b.58–60), and thus recalls exactly this moment of return. As such, the return of the opening music of ‘Silent Noon’ works to re-perform an ‘earlier’ music that has already been made, but that has temporarily receded into the background: a ‘song’ whose performance is exposed by a narration of the poetic voice. Crucially, the moment of re-performing a song of the past in the present is unconscious and embodied, as the blank, sonic vocal utterance ‘Oh!’ suggests. The exclamation of recognition is an embodied response to the musical return, as the consciousness of a cerebral articulation is only engaged when the poetic voice shifts to the past tense in its very final words. In this way, the re-singing of the song’s opening music becomes the recovery of a lost music, performed by an unconscious, communal, and thus English voice of the present.

By staging a performance of musical recovery as the focus of Rossetti’s erotic evocation of landscape, Vaughan Williams engages a complex set of constructions that collected around both the idea and the sound of the English voice during the early decades of the century. ‘Silent Noon’ transmutes the union of two lovers, contained and embedded upon the site of the land, into a broader statement of community, as this ‘two-fold’ song becomes a glorification of song itself, a site upon which communal performances of national identity were powerfully focused during the early decades of the twentieth century. The extensive, sharp-side harmonic exploration conveyed through the middle section of ‘Silent Noon’ enables, with the final return to the home key of E-flat major, a sense of re-entering a place once known, but temporarily forgotten. This song performs a return of man to the land, from which the English voice is drawn, and in which it is re-sounded.

Situating early twentieth-century English art songs in relation to an associated vocal culture promises a rich means of examining the aesthetics of a genre powerfully

influenced by contemporaneous cultural ideas of memory, tradition, voice, and performance. The scope of the current article necessitates that the reflections offered above represent but a preliminary outline of the ways in which the subtle intersections between this genre and its associated musical culture might begin to be recovered. Yet they are suggestive, nevertheless, of the potential efficacy of such contextual elaboration, particularly in regard to probing deeper into the aesthetics of what Stephen Banfield has called the ‘Romantic’, ‘vernacular’, and ‘conservationist’ ethos of early twentieth-century English art songs.¹²⁴ The self-consciousness with which ‘Silent Noon’ stages a performance of musical regeneration and renewal prompts a reconsideration not only of the complex ways in which Vaughan Williams mediated the idea of ‘ancestral’ music in his works, but of the myriad contemporaneous cultural forces impacting upon the genre of twentieth-century English art song more broadly. The notion of the composer as singer reaches to the heart of a series of unexamined constructions of English musical identity. By the same token, the notion of the singer as a collaborative creator foregrounds new perspectives from which to view the dynamics of creating community in the making of national music during the English musical renaissance.

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¹²⁴ See Stephen Banfield ed., *The Twentieth Century* (The Blackwell History of Music in Britain) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 465–6.

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Musical Examples

Largo sostenuto

5

Voice

Piano

mp *sonore*

mf Your hands lie o - pen in the long fresh

simile

10

grass, The fin-ger points look through like ro - sy blooms: Your eyes smile peace.

pp

pp

mf

Red. *

Example 1. 'Silent Noon', bb. 1–11.

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15

The pas-ture gleams and glooms 'Neath bil - low-ing skies that scat-ter and a -

cresc

Poco più mosso 20

mass.

f

pp

simile

25

All round our nest, far as the eye can pass, are

p

30

gold - en king-cup fields with sil - ver edge, Where the cow - pars - ley

Example 2. 'Silent Noon', bb. 12–52.

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35

skirts the haw - thorn hedge. 'Tis vis - i - ble si - lence,

pp *pp poco rall*

pp *poco rall.*

Red. * *Red.* *

40

still as the hour - glass.

più p *a tempo*

cresc

Red. * *Red.* *

Quasi Recitative 45

Deep in the sun-search'd growths the drag - on-fly hangs

pp una corda

50

like a blue thread loos-en'd from the sky:

Red. *

Example 2 (continued)

55

So this wing'd hour is dropt to us from a - bove.

f *p*

60 *poco rall.* *a tempo*

Oh! clasp we to our hearts, for death - less dower, This close-com

mf

poco rall. *mf* *sonore*

65 70

pan - ion'd in - ar - ti - cu - late hour, When two - fold si - lence was the song

pp *pp*

Red. *

Example 3. 'Silent Noon', bb. 53–77

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75

— the song of love.

The musical score is for a piece in B-flat major, 4/4 time. It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with a whole note G4, followed by a half note A4, and then a half note Bb4. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note bass line in the left hand and a more complex melody in the right hand, including chords and single notes. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

Example 3 (continued)